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UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST

Palestine refugees in the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The present report is submitted to the General Assembly in pursuance of resolution 46/46 E of 9 December 1991, the operative paragraphs of which read as follows:

"The General Assembly,

"...

"1. Strongly reiterates its demand that Israel desist from the removal and resettlement of Palestine refugees in the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967 and from the destruction of their shelters;

"2. Requests the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to address the acute situation of the Palestine refugees in the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967 and accordingly to extend all the services of the Agency to those refugees;

"3. Requests the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the Commissioner-General, to resume issuing identification cards to all Palestine refugees and their descendants in the occupied Palestinian territory, irrespective of whether or not they are recipients of rations and services of the Agency;

"4. Also requests the Secretary-General, after consulting with the Commissioner-General, to report to the General Assembly, before the opening of its forty-seventh session, on the implementation of the present resolution and in particular on the compliance of Israel with paragraph 1 above."

2. On 18 March 1992, the Secretary-General addressed a note verbale to the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, in which he drew attention to his reporting responsibility under the resolution and requested the Permanent Representative to inform him of any steps his Government had taken or envisaged taking in implementation of the relevant provisions of the resolution.

3. In a note verbale dated 30 June 1992, the Permanent Representative of Israel replied as follows:

"Israel's position on this resolution has been set forth in successive annual replies submitted to the Secretary-General in recent years. The report of the Secretary-General (A/46/536) contained the latest of these replies. In addition, Israel's representative to the Special Political Committee reiterated Israel's position during his statement dated 27 October 1989 (A/SPC/44/SR.8).

"This resolution is unbalanced and distorted in that its sponsors intentionally ignore the improved living conditions in the Gaza District since 1967. Nothing can be more indicative of this approach than this resolution's condemnation of refugee rehabilitation projects. Since 1967, Israel has initiated community development projects in the Gaza District enabling some 20,000 families, approximately 150,000 persons, to leave the refugee camps on a voluntary basis and relocate to nearby residential areas. Israel's vital role in planning and implementing these housing projects has been recognized by both the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner of UNRWA in their respective reports (A/40/613 and A/40/13).

"Furthermore, the resolution's request of the Secretary-General to resume issuing identity cards irrespective of the refugees' need for them is yet another indication of the resolution's patent political bias.

"Notwithstanding subversive efforts to the contrary, Israel is determined to pursue the humanitarian task of improving the living conditions of the refugees through projects such as the refugee housing programmes. Israel will welcome all assistance on behalf of the international community intended to improve the refugees' living conditions."

4. The following information concerning Israel's compliance with General Assembly resolution 46/46 E is based on reports from the Commissioner-General of UNRWA.

5. During the period under review, the Israeli authorities have continued to demolish and seal refugee shelters in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank on punitive grounds. The matter is dealt with in detail in the Commissioner-General's annual report to the General Assembly. 1/

6. The Agency is following up with the Israeli authorities the rehousing of refugees who remain affected by the demolitions in 1971 in the Gaza Strip. Paragraph 6 of last year's report (A/46/536) referred to the status of 87 families categorized as living in hardship conditions. The situation on 30 June 1992 remains virtually the same: of these 87 families, 12 continue to live in conditions of hardship, 19 remain unsatisfactorily housed, 37 are satisfactorily housed and 18 had previously purchased houses in projects sponsored by the Israeli authorities. As mentioned in last year's report, one family bought a piece of land and built a house. The situation of the 12 families living in conditions of hardship has been checked several times during the reporting period. Despite repeated assurances by the Israeli authorities that they will be rehoused, that a solution has been developed and would be implemented as soon as possible, no progress has been made.

7. During the reporting period, the Commissioner-General obtained the following information relating to refugee shelters demolished by the Israeli authorities in the Gaza Strip on the grounds that they had been built without proper authority on State land outside camp boundaries:

(a) There has been no change in the situation of the families living on the northern perimeter of Jabalia Camp who, as described in paragraph 7 (a) of last year's report, had been told by the Israeli authorities in 1989 to remove some of their shelter extensions. No demolitions have taken place so far, but the shelters remain isolated by the bulldozing of sand around them.

(b) Of the 35 families whose shelters on the perimeter of Beach Camp were demolished in 1983, 18 families now have plots of land at Sheikh Radwan and Beit Lahiya Housing Projects; one family is occupying a vacant shelter in Beach Camp and the situation of the remaining 16 families remains the same as was described in paragraph 7 (b) of last year's report.

8. Regarding the situation of the families who, at the instance of the Israeli authorities, had agreed to relocate from Block Q of Rafah Camp to the Tel-es-Sultan Housing Project, of the families who remained in the 13 shelters, of which 12 are isolated by sand ramparts, one family has moved to Tel-es-Sultan Housing Project in Rafah.

9. During the reporting period, no new plots of land in housing projects in the Gaza Strip were allocated by the Israeli authorities for refugees living in camps. No new movements took place from camps to housing projects and no new plots were allocated. Nine families, comprising 91 persons from Canada Camp in Egypt, have returned to the Gaza Strip to accommodation provided by the Israeli authorities in Tel-es-Sultan.

10. The Israeli authorities, according to information available to the Commissioner-General, have to date allocated approximately 3,914 plots of land in the Gaza Strip for housing projects. A total of 2,605 plots have been built on by 3,714 refugee families comprising 22,946 persons, buildings on 236 plots are under construction, 936 plots are still vacant and 137 have been built on by non-refugee families. In addition, 3,034 refugee families, consisting of 18,823 persons, have moved into 2,666 completed housing units consisting of 5,893 rooms.

11. Refugee families are continuing to purchase plots of land at subsidized rates for the construction of houses in the projects developed by the Israeli authorities in the Beit Lahiya, Nazleh and Tel-es-Sultan areas. The construction of multi-storey apartment blocks in Sheikh Radwan, sponsored by the Israeli authorities and offered for sale upon completion, as reported last year (A/46/536, para. 11), continues, but the process has slowed down considerably owing to the prevailing situation.

12. With regard to the request addressed to the Commissioner-General in paragraph 2 of resolution 46/46 E, the Commissioner-General advises that since 1988, in addition to providing all its regular services, the Agency has been providing emergency food, medical and other assistance to those in need in the occupied territory. The Agency has also begun a longer-term programme to upgrade infrastructure, especially in the camps, and to improve economic and social conditions. These programmes are discussed in detail in the recent reports of the Commissioner-General. 2/

13. The Secretary-General regrets that he is unable at present to comply with the request addressed to him in paragraph 3 of the resolution. Under an arrangement that has been followed for 40 years, all refugee families registered with UNRWA are in possession of registration cards issued by the Agency. While these cards indicate the number of family members and whether they are eligible for services, they are not identification cards and have a much more limited purpose. The Commissioner-General of UNRWA has pointed out that the Agency issues a registration card reflecting data about the refugee family concerned, which is entered on the registration roll at the time of registration. While the need for documentation, such as is required in the resolution, is appreciated, the Commissioner-General does not have the means to issue identity cards as such. He will, however, keep the situation under review to see whether appropriate documentation regarding the registration status of individual members of refugee families could be issued.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 13 (A/47/13), chap. VII, sect. B.

2/ Ibid., Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 13 (A/43/13), chap. II, sect. B; ibid., Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 13 (A/44/13), chap. VI, sects. C and D; ibid., Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 13 (A/45/13), chap. VI, sects. C and D; ibid., Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 13 (A/46/13), chap. VI, sects. C and D; ibid., Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 13 (A/47/13), chap. VI, sects. C and D.